



News Release

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Successful First Day for Midwest Levee Conference

The Midwest Levee Conference, sponsored by the St. Louis elements of the Society of American Military Engineers and the American Society of Civil Engineers, kicked off this morning at the Hyatt Regency St. Louis Riverfront Hotel with 335 registered participants.

Following a video showing pictures from various regional flood events and featuring interviews with local flood protection system stakeholders, Col. Lewis F. Setliff III, Commander for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers St. Louis District, welcomed the group.

He told the gathering of representatives from regional architecture and engineering companies, levee boards and federal, state and local agencies that the conference is designed to serve as a forum for technology exchange in the science and engineering fields related to flood risk management.

Setliff noted that the region's attitude about its flood protection systems is "passionate" and emphasized the importance of everyone working together to manage flood risk. He also noted the importance of communicating risk to the public. Flood protection systems can minimize risk but they cannot eliminate all risk, Setliff emphasized.

Brig. Gen. Michael Walsh, Commander of the Corps' Mississippi Valley Division, emphasized the same point saying, "This conference is focused on partnerships. We all have the same customers, those who live and work behind these protective structures. For public safety reasons alone, the public needs to understand associated risks."

Conditions impacting some regional levees include aging infrastructure and deficiencies that prevent the levees from providing authorized levels of protection.

The conference agenda features numerous regional experts. This morning's schedule included a presentation from Rod Mayer, Chief of the Division of Floodplain Management for the California Department of Water Resources, who shared experiences from California's ongoing efforts to address issues with its levee systems. Dr. Robert Patev, a deputy lead for a portion of the Interagency Performance Evaluation Task Force, an in-depth analysis of the New Orleans and Southeast Louisianan Hurricane Protection System, shared lessons learned from the team's work to date.

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The Corps' Director for Civil Works Steve Stockton flew in from Washington D.C. for the conference and gave a presentation titled "Flood Risk Management: A Systems Approach." Stockton discussed the cultural change ongoing within the Army Corps of Engineers, which is moving towards a systems-based approach and implementing the 12 Actions for Change, which will transform the Corps' priorities, processes and planning. The 12 Actions for Change were announced in August 2006 and resulted from analyses done after Hurricane Katrina, as well as internal and external examinations of the Corps in the recent past.

Steve McCaskie, co-chairman for the conference and a member of the SAME St. Louis Post, was pleasantly surprised at the overwhelming response to the conference. "I'm pleased at the turn out, which demonstrates an interest in our region's flood protection systems," McCaskie said. "There's something for everyone on the agenda, whether they're interested in recent policy or guidance, infrastructure, or engineering technology and solutions."

The conference is covering three main themes: flood risk management, levee system assessments and technology exchange, and continuing challenges. The conference demonstrates a continued emphasis and focus on the Midwest's flood protection systems and a commitment to sharing expertise and lessons learned across state boundaries and ensuring the public has reliable flood protection.

The Midwest Levee Conference concludes Thursday with a Bi-State Regional Levee Summit hosted by the East-West Gateway Council of Governments. The council has been involved in the Southwestern Illinois Flood Prevention Initiative Leadership Task Force, which is working the tri-county effort to fund levee repairs. The summit is scheduled from 10:15 a.m. to noon.

For more information about the conference or to view the agenda, visit the conference web site at: <http://www.midwestleveeconference.com>

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Photo Caption: Col. Lewis F. Setliff III, Commander of the Corps' St. Louis District looks on as Brig. Gen. Michael Walsh, Commander of the Corps' Mississippi Valley Division, gives remarks at the Midwest Levee Conference on June 3. The conference, sponsored by the St. Louis elements of the Society of American Military Engineers and the American Society of Civil Engineers, is being held in St. Louis June 3-5. (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers photo taken by Alan Dooley)

Editor's Note: For additional conference photos or higher quality photos, please contact George Stringham at George.E.Stringham2@usace.army.mil or 314-331-8095. Alan Dooley, Chief of Public Affairs, will be on site during the conference and can be reached by cell at 618-719-9039.